TOURIST RESOURCES AND TOURIST ATTRACTIONS: CONCEPTUALIZATION, CLASSIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT

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Based on analysis of diverse **definitions** of *tourist resource* and *tourist attraction* in works from Hispanic America, we identified two cross-cutting conceptual elements: both *attractions* and *resources* are natural or cultural goods (in the formal sense) and have the capacity to inspire visits (in the functional sense). A review of existing **classification** schemes revealed a widespread focus on the formal aspect. Moreover, there is a broad exclusion of intangible goods, moveable goods, people, and human groups. Hence, we propose a classification of *tourist resources*, which utilizes the theoretical basis of UNESCO's *heritage* classification and that of a previous essay of ours on tourist systems. This new formulation takes into account the following criteria: origin (natural, cultural, or human), materiality (tangible or intangible), and movability (moveable or unmovable). It is actually possible, and in fact common, to find resources with diverse combinations criteria.

Human tourist resources are the novelty in this scheme. Tourist flows can be driven by individuals (artists, athletes, political and religious leaders, scientists, and intellectuals) and social groups (e.g., aborigines, blacks, hippies, cowboys, gypsies, and Mennonites), past and present, and even fictional ones (although fictional characters can also be classified as cultural resources, they are included here to facilitate identification and management). Classified separately, human beings comprise bodies (the natural component) as well as meanings (the cultural component). This dual characteristic gives rise to a specific procedure for converting resources into attractions. Additionally, the classifications of movable, unmovable and intangible closely correspond to living people, mortuary remains, and fictional figures, respectively.

With respect to **materiality**, it is highlighted that intangible tourist resources often are materialized and manifested in tangible attractions. Deliberate materialization of tourist resources is a fundamental procedure in the design and production of attractions. Additionally, the inverse process of materialization, that is, the identification and management of representations associated with material tourist resources, leads to a stimulating intellectual exercise when converting resources into attractions.

With respect to **movability**, living and biotic beings (natural or human resources) that are mobile (which can move on their own) are included as movable resources; those that are immobile (which cannot move on their own) are included as unmovable resources. On the other hand, among abiotic beings or factors, resources that can be moved are considered movable, and others that cannot be moved (or usually are not) are classified as unmovable. Also with respect to mobility, it is noted that the condition of being *movable* facilitates the movement of the resource in many cases: it is a disadvantage in that it reduces the need to move potential visitors to the destination; it is also an advantage, in that it makes it possible for movable resources (a common virtue of intangible resources) to be moved to the potential visitor and increase the desire to visit.

Next, the idea is presented that a *tourist resource* does not mean just any resource, but a relevant one that is distinguished from other similar ones by some particularity, a *primus inter pares*. This characteristic motivates visits because visitors believe that direct contact with the resource satisfies some type of necessity, desire, or demand. Displacement is an effect rather than the cause: the causes are the *relevant characteristics* of the resource. Focusing on the notable attributes of the resource also makes possible an independent analysis of visitors' potential response. This leads to a simplified **concept** of *tourist resources*: "goods with relevant characteristics."

Considering resources' "relevant characteristics," a proposal for **assessment** is presented which goes beyond CICATUR–OAE's well-known "Hierarchization of tourist resources." It is based on these criteria: uniqueness, superiority (absolute and relative), antiquity or newness (absolute and relative), frequency, diversity, meaning, functionality, and sensibility. This proposal arises from a study of the tourist promotional discourse and its inexorable construction through the virtues of tourist resources. To demonstrate this, it is sufficient to review the content of pamphlets, web sites, tourist guides, slogans, journalistic articles on tourist destination, tourists' stories after visits, audio tours, signs, and explanations of tourist guides: the most valued resources are unique, superior, numerous, ancient or new, frequent or infrequent, varied, meaningful, useful, beautiful.

In the context of these ideas, we reflect on the type of **connection** that resources establish with visitors and the **attitudes** that they develop: some are relevant for their capacity to impress, which create sensory connections and invite contemplation. Some are interesting for the information they offer and create intellectual connections and demand to be interpreted. This differentiation facilitates the process of conversion from tourist resource to tourist attraction: in this way, the interpretation demands some type of intermediary explanation of the resource to the visitor, that is, it requires developing a **narrative** or guide (written or oral) based on the resource's notable characteristics. Additionally, contemplation requires certain facilities.

Differences are identified between the categories *tourist resource* and *tourist attraction*, often used interchangeably in the literature on tourism. Official definitions in Spanish are reviewed from the Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy and it is seen that *resources*: 1. have the goal of resolving needs, 2. imply the idea of goods in their original state, 3. is not a term exclusive to tourism. Additionally, it is noted that the noun *atractivo* does not exist in Spanish (in the sense given it in tourism), but the verb *atraer* does. On the other hand, the noun *attraction* does exist in English, widely used in the term *tourist attraction*,

so we inferred that the Spanish term *atractivo turístico* is an Anglicism. The English definition qualifies an *attraction* as *interesting* or *enjoyable*, in line with the intellectual and sensory connections between resources and tourists, mentioned above. The English definition also introduces the idea that what is interesting and enjoyable is not only a "*place to go*," but also a "*thing to do*," that is, a *tourist activity*.

With this information, we developed the idea that tourist resources are not in fact equivalent to tourist attractions: they are relevant but do not motivate a trip. On the contrary, tourist attractions not based on tourist resources are not possible. In this way, tourist resources give rise to tourist attractions, as much as tourist attractions are sustained by tourist resources. This process of conversion from resource into attraction consists in making the resource known and possible to visit. **Minimum** conversion means making a resource known by identifying, assessing, and disseminating information. **Sophisticated conversion** means making it possible to visit a resource and facilitate a tourist experience, which implies providing facilities and/or the development of a narrative (and even activities). Tourist attractions are essentially converted tourist resources.

Once the difference between resources and attractions is established, we turn to the existence of tourist attractions that do not arise from resources but rather are sustained by representations: symbols, images, and concepts, which may be positive, negative, or neutral, and which may be widespread, just spread (in time, space, or social groups) or individual. For the criteria *connection* and *attitude*, representations establish an experiential connection with the visitor and demand a participatory attitude, which is materialized as a *tourist activity*.

Returning to the steps necessary for designing tourist attractions, we discuss that in fact they do not always result from the conversion of a resource or representation: in some cases, tourist attractions are **created**. Generally, created attractions are independent of tourist destinations. They can be carried out anywhere because they do not have a geographical or cultural tie to a particular place.

We propose **classifying** *tourist attractions* as: recognized, converted, and created. As a product of this typology, a **definition** of a *tourist attraction* is outlined: "A tourist representation or resource created or converted to facilitate a tourist experience (contemplation, interpretation, or participation)." Although promotion and publicity should come after conversion or creation, in practice, there are many inconsistencies: resources are sometimes promoted without having been converted (but are only recognized) or before having been converted (or even created). It is not uncommon for tourist products (attractions bundled with services, usually called *packages*) to be commercialized based on resources that are merely recognized but advertised as converted.

Through the identification, classification, and assessment of tourist resources and representations, it is possible to **diagnose** the degree of "conversion" to tourist attraction, considering attitudes the resource motivates and actions undertaken. In this way, the following elements are evaluated:

§   Contemplation: resources that invite contemplation require adequate facilities. Review and improvement is suggested for inadequate facilites and building them if they do not exist. Activities and narratives should be assessed, insofar as they complement or affect contemplation, taking their intrusive nature into account.

§ Interpretation: resources that invite interpretation require adequate stories. Review and improvement is suggested for inadequate or excessive narrative and their creation if they do not exist. Activities and facilities should be assessed, insofar as they complement or affect interpretation, taking their intrusive nature into account.

§ Participation: resources that invite participation require adequate activities. Review and improvement is suggested for inadequate activities and their development if they do not exist. Activities and facilities should be assessed, insofar as they complement or affect participation, taking their intrusive nature into account.

Based on these diagnostic tools, a means for **assessing** tourist attractions is proposed, based on the degree of conversion or creation. Thus, three values of tourist attractions are proposed:

§ Developed: a representation or resource adequately converted or created (in qualitative and quantitative terms) to facilitate tourist experience, particularly in consideration of the connection established with tourists.

§ Semi-developed: a representation or resource inadequately converted or created (in qualitative and quantitative terms) to facilitate the tourist experience, particularly in consideration of the connection established with tourists.

§ Pseudo-developed: a representation or resource converted without considering the connection established with the tourist (incompatible management).

■ Under-developed: an unconverted representation or resource (no management) or one that is only recognized (minimum conversion).

■ Over-developed: a representation or resource converted through the intrusive implementation of the instruments of conversion: facilities, stories, or activities (excessive management).

These reflections deal with essential topics, knowledge, and methodologies that are perhaps limited to tourism professionals and rarely communicated or questioned in academic settings. All professions with the goal of making an impact require methodological tools for diagnosis and assessment, in order to get to know the real situation in which they will intervene. This research is based on the perceived gaps in the foundations of tourist management (public and private); that is, upon knowing and assessing the raw material to be converted. It is hoped that this is an invitation to re-think or think more in-depth about the principles of tourism as an object of study and management, and tourismology as a scientific discipline